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# SHADOWS

ON THE

# WALL

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BY BERT FINCK



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# Shadows on the Wall



# Shadows on the Wall ✓

By

BERT FINCK ✓

Author of *Webs*, *Musings on the  
Lounge*, *Plays*, etc.



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DEDICATED TO  
THE MEMORY OF MY FRIEND  
MADISON CAWEIN

Look, then, into thine heart and write!  
Yes, into Life's deep stream!  
All forms of sorrow and delight,  
All solemn Voices of the Night,  
That can soothe thee, or affright,  
Be these henceforth thy theme.

*Longfellow.*

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# Shadows on the Wall



## PEOPLE

I always did love people. Dearer to me—far, far more interesting than picture, story, scene of nature, play, was ever a human face. When merest child, I would turn aside from the features of a show, to lose myself in the expression of a woman, man, or child; and I would soon be weaving stories of that face; and that face would long be haunting me, and following me, and calling me. I always did love people. As I grew older, I often wandered through the streets at night, and oft pursued through dark and lonely spots a face that set my reveries ablaze. That is why I loved the streets; that is why I loved to roam at night; that is why I loved to lounge at the street corners and watch the lights—though oft pale lights—of souls. And I have never yet met a soul that I could hate. I have pitied souls; I have wept for them; but I

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could never condemn them, and they were great to me, even in their crimes. I have often yearned to place my arms about all sinners and weep with them for their errors and for mine. Hate any one at all? I know of no one I could hate. What, hate people for their weakness? hate people for their fever? hate people for their madness? hate people for their sores? I always did love people, and saw but good in them. I cannot dream of a soul that is perfectly bad; the darkest villain has his affections; crimes have been committed from worthy aims. I always did love people and I love to be one of them, with their faults, their hopes, and their follies, and their romps of childhood, which they never outgrow. I love to be in the streets with the people, ever ready to speak with my own.

### POET'S REVERY

This is all I know; that I must suffer day by day, and night by night, and struggle, fall, and quiver every hour with the anguish of my wounds. There is no balm for me; and I can only utter cries of pain the world calls poetry or philosophy, to praise, condemn, or idly criticize, oblivious to all but what they really are—the pleadings of my agony.

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### BALM

All night long, wild pains torment me—all night long. All night long, a face bends o'er me—all night long. All night long, I burn and shiver with alternate fire and cold. All night long, a sweet voice whispers, "After night must come the morn."

### TO ETHEL, DEPARTED

You understand, now, do you not, dear Ethel, how I looked upon you as a flower of heaven? as a lily wafted down from the garden of the angels, to give this earth a glimpse and perfume of celestial purity.

You understand now, how I loved you, as one above the mortals, as one whose holy beauty bent my knees as to a shrine? You understand it all, now, how I loved and why kept silent? how in the light of my adoration words would always fade away?

You understand it all, now, how I was always kneeling before you as my soul, dear, and so I could not speak. And you understand it all, now, how when you left this earth to join the flowers above, dear, I then could speak—too late.

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### GAIN

To gain, whate'er it be, means sacrifice. If it be art, we must divorce ourselves from earthly peace and comfort; if it be wealth, we must give up our hearts; if it be sovereignty, we must surrender joys of comradeship; if it be worldly pleasures, we first must banish thought.

### HELL

Can there be greater punishment than this, than to behold the staring, awful fact that, on account of our own foolish acts, we are not with the blessed: Can there be fiercer purgatorial fire—can there be sharper torment of the damned—than realization of the dreadful truth that we ourselves lost Heaven?

### INSPIRATION

I run up and down, and up and down, yet I can never catch her. At last, I slip and stumble, and I can not move at all. Then lo! as I lie there on the stairway, despairing, she who is the cause of my anguish, glides softly down the steps, and I grasp the end of her gown! I draw her toward me, and I bless my fall.

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### SORROW

It is true that hearts break every hour of the day; but they do not die; they continue to live, and it is to the music of their moanings that the world rolls on.

### SIN

As long as there's unsatisfied yearning for love, there will be sin. As long as there's thirst for sympathy, there will be sin. As long as there are torments in body and mind, there will be sin. As long as there are ghosts that reproach and pursue, there will be sin. As long as there's the sad, staring face of mistake, there will be sin. As long as there's the cold icy clutch of remorse, there will be sin. As long as there is ghoulissh, vampirish despair, there will be sin.

### ON THE CROSS

Even as Christ, the incarnation of Sympathy, suffered upon the cross, so at this moment, and so in this world forever, Sympathy hangs upon the cross.

Even as Christ, the incarnation of Gentleness, was cruelly tortured on the cross, so at this moment, and so in this world forever, Gentleness feels the awful wounds of the cross.

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Even as Christ, the incarnation of Sensitive-ness, bore the agony of the cross, so at this moment, and so in this world forever, Sensitive-ness groans upon the cross.

Even as Christ, the incarnation of Unselfish-ness, writhed under the torments of the cross, so at this moment, and so in this world forever, Unselfishness quivers with the nails of the cross.

### LIGHT OF NIGHT

I thank Thee, Lord, for all my woes, my sufferings, and pains. I thank Thee for the holy gifts of sorrow and of wounds. I thank Thee for the privilege to know the heart of life, learned not from laughter, but from tears, beneath the stars of night.

I thank Thee for heart knowledge that gives to me sympathy, so I may understand the cross and the hour of Calvary.

### DE PROFUNDIS

When we sit down, and think of all our follies, our broken hopes, and dreams forever gone, our wasted youth, and opportunities blasted, we can do no more than pray, "God, let us die!"

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When we sit down, and ghostly forms surround us—ghosts of ambition, perished in their prime, of wrecked love, and friendship coldly murdered, we can no more than pray, “God, let us die!”

When we sit down, amidst dead, staring faces of outraged duty and of crushed ideals, of aspiration stifled in its glory, we can no more than pray, “God, let us die!”

When we sit down, and hear the mocking laughter of sin that gave us nothing but remorse for hours spent in its treacherous embraces, we can no more than pray, “God, let us die!”

When we sit down in the uncanny presence of doubt and shame and quivering despair, and listen to life’s dirge of disappointment, we can no more than pray, “God, let us die!”

But when we see amidst those ghastly visions, and hear amidst those notes of wild complaint, a voice and hand imploring aid and mercy, we can but kneel and pray, “God, let us live!”

### ADVERSITY

There was a time when I would shrink from you, Adversity! from your dull tattered gown and wrinkled brow; yet as I shrank, you did not draw away from me, but cast your shadow heavier over me. And I have grown to love you,

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Oh, Adversity! for you at least have never left my side, while hopes and dreams and aspirations faded, and human loyalty and friendship often paled. And I have grown to love your tattered garments and to feel softness in your wrinkled brow; and I have grown to know you as a comrade, and to feel your shadow as a sheltering cloak, beneath whose folds more and more I see peeping the hidden gems and treasures of life's night.

### TRAVELING

I am traveling in a foreign country, and there are many others traveling there with me. Among those others there are many whom I admire and with whom I would companion be; but they do not speak my native language, and we can only be polite to each other, and that is as near to each other as we can ever be. At last, on the way, I meet one of my own country, in whom there is little to admire that I can see; but he does speak my own language, and he easily becomes my companion as we travel along the way. So it is as we travel through life; 'tis not always the ones we admire the most that become our daily companions, but more often those that speak our nature's tongue; and especially when the words of that tongue are frailties; it has been ever so.

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### A STORM

The winds are tossing with her cares (Oh, Mother of Mercy, pray for her!). The rain is falling with her tears (Oh, Mother of Mercy, pray for her!). Midst the flash of the lightning, dead dreams glare (Oh, Mother of Mercy, pray for her!). And murdered hopes join the ghosts of the air (Oh, Mother of Mercy, pray for her!).

### THE MOTHER

A mother prayed one night that her sick child might not be seized by death. Her prayer was heard and granted; and one day after that, she saw him covered by the shadows of disgrace. And then, the sword-sharp thought pierced through her broken heart, "Far better had I prayed that night, 'Thy will, O Lord, be done.'"

### WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

I have learned this, by sorrow and experience, that life's a mystery which none can understand; that they are mad who dream that they can solve it, and the greatest fools are they who think that they are wise.

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I have learned this, that fortune is a wanton, and that there is no way at all to win her moods; no settled rule to gain her heart or favor, and her whims are unaccountable and strange.

I have learned this, that it is the height of folly to set one's trust upon an earthly day; that there's no power that is not perishable, except the power of eternity.

I have learned this, that it is wild pretension to say what I will do or where I'll go; to-day I may be dressing for my wedding; to-night that dress may serve me for my tomb.

I have learned this, that all who live must suffer, and in the fever of their pain, they sin; that aspiration means a crucifixion, and souls all feel the agony of the cross.

I have learned this, that it is vain presumption to judge the act of any one at all; that wisdom weeps when it beholds the fallen, and knowledge wears the crown of sympathy.

### THE REASON FOR IT

It was not that she cared so much for him; it was not that he cared so much for her; it was because their hearts spoke the same language and understood each other—that was all.

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### HER SMILE

He does not care how much he suffers, so long as she is free from pain; it matters not what storms are coming, so long as she is not in their way. No frown of fortune can torment him, no dying hope can make him quail, so long as he can see her smiling, for then, all shadows fade away.

### AN INVALID'S PRAYER

Grant that my pains and sufferings, Lord, be those that would have come to them I love, had they not come to me! Grant that the crosses which I bear be those that were taken away from my friends, and in place of the night Thou hast given to me, Lord, give to them day!

### THE LADY-AT-THE-DESK

All day long she is the flower of a corner pharmacy; at her sight all drugs and bottles lose their power to affright. All day long peace, joy, and comfort fall on customers and clerks from the presence of the flower they call the Lady-at-the-desk. All day long she fills the business of the corner store with light, and departing, leaves behind her brightness that

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illumines night. Who will be the best remembered when the door of business closes? Such as she, the guardian flower, faithful Lady-at-the-desk.

### ALL SOULS' DAY THOUGHT

I know not what to-morrow may bring me;  
I know not where to-morrow I may be;  
But this I know, whatever be the day,  
I still can love, and for my loved ones pray.

### FLAG-DAY PRAYER

God bless our flag, and give us grace to love it fervently, and bear it always in our hearts as one of Thy most precious gifts—our flag of Liberty. Help us to feel the holy spirits it invokes of loyalty and sacrifice, and fill our breasts with joyous readiness to heed its every call. Give us strength, O Lord, to save it from desecration at the hands of all its enemies at home and abroad—profiteers, and selfish politicians who would sell our freedom as they sell their souls, Bolsheviki, anarchists, and other vermin of the kind. And give us gratitude, O Lord, to forever remember the glorious ones who suffered and died for our flag.

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### HOPES

One by one old hopes part from me; one by one new hopes smile on me. Hopes, like flowers, bloom and fade, leaving others to renew the light they give along life's way that turns night into day.

### AFTER-THOUGHTS

There is cold in this world that no fire can relieve. There is thirst in this world that no water can relieve. There is hunger in this world that no food can relieve. There are aches in this world that no balm can relieve. Oh, to think of the suffering and pain in this world that none of the wealth in this world can relieve! Oh, to think of the sufferings and pain in this world that the voice of one heart in this world could relieve!

Let me think of it but so, and be at rest: the bitter words he hurled at me, his friend, they were not his, but rather of a strange uncanny spirit that stole his tongue; the fiends work sometimes thus; and I should be assisting them, did I take those words as his.

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The sword that pierces through my heart strikes through the hearts of others; there is no solitude anywhere, except for those that have never suffered.

Many an unskillful gardener destroys the roots of choicest flowers in his garden; many an unskillful teacher destroys the roots of choicest natures in his school.

To be an old man, while your life is young, with troubled thoughts, and dreamings dark and wild, with ghosts surrounding you all night and day—this is remorse, remorse. No breeze can cool you, and no fire can warm; no balm can soothe you, and no medicine cure; no sun can brighten, and no star give hope—this is remorse, remorse. The world is all a charnel house for you, and nature breathes forth naught but tragedy; each flower blooms to decorate a grave; and the winds chant only dirges for lost souls—this is remorse, remorse.

If a dream for a moment can brighten your eye—fool, fool, if you cast away dreams! If a dream for a moment can quicken your step—if a dream for a moment can straighten your back—if a dream for a moment can mellow your

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laugh—fool, fool, if you cast away dreams. If a dream for a moment can smooth your rough skin and turn frowns and furrows into dimples and smiles—if a dream for a moment can chase ghosts from your heart—if a dream for a moment can change death into life—if a dream for a moment can make heaven of hell—fool, fool, if you cast away dreams!

There are things that no power on earth can tell us—not even the boasted wisdom of the East. No brain can e'er tell us why some souls must suffer—too often, the gentlest—from their cradles to their graves. No seer can tell us why the noblest ambitions that fulfilled would brighten this world with hope, must stumble and fall on the rocks of life's roadway, and there perish from lack of nourishment and care. No book can tell us why arrogant injustice sits on the thrones of opportunities to condemn, or why fools rule as sovereigns and judges, and why wise men must bend their knees to clowns. No Solon and no Solomon can give to us the reason why the meanest spirits jingle the most coin, or why imbeciles are robed in silk and satin, and are wreathed with flowers like tributes to a tomb. There is no mortal with the learning of the

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ancients, or with the upstart teachings of the day, who can tell why men and women flee to sin for rest and comfort, while virtue sees them pass with cold disdain.

With the dust of your murdered dreams stifling your heart, and the fragments of your broken ideals scattered about your feet, and the ghosts of your past mistakes ever pointing their ghastly fingers at your breast, and your every breath yearning for the peace of death—still to live, at the inexorable bidding of duty—is not this the height of heroism?

Who am I, that I should expect not to suffer, when there's no human life that in some way does not suffer? Who am I, that I should hope not to sin, where there's no one on earth not in some way a sinner? Who am I, that I should rail at my ghosts of ambition, when the world is one vast sepulchre for ashes of dead dreams? Am I a god, that I must not suffer? must not fail, must not sin? Oh, conceit and maddest of all to grumble! I am human; I must suffer; I must fail; I must sin.

Beware of asking personal questions, for you know not what dark shadow they may invoke,

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what pain, what sorrow almost forgotten, your question may arouse from the dead. For so many of us are often struggling to escape from ghostly thoughts, and we cannot feel kindly toward you, if you bring them back to us.

Happiness lies in the word congeniality—congeniality of company, congeniality of atmosphere, congeniality of work.

Some lives are frail barks on the sea of adversity, ever tossing upon its wild waves; they know not how a quiet ride might feel; a calm would be more ominous than a storm; and they at last become used to their tempestuous voyage, and the roaring of the waves soothes them to sleep.

To cast out sin, you must first feed hungry hearts; Christ sympathized with sinners; therefore he saved them.

One word or clasp of gentle sympathy can save more souls than can all the homilies.

The strongest weapon against insanity is a kind and loving heart.

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My health and my fortune are not in my power to control; but of my disposition I am master, and disposition makes our lives either happy or unhappy, just as we will: I can turn by the color of my disposition my life into brightest morning or darkest night.

How often does a headache mean a heart-ache; and how often does a curse choke down a sob.

The true poet, like the song bird, sings because he cannot help but sing, whether he wills or no; he questions not wherefore, or audience, or fee; he gives forth but the voice of his heart.

What are insects of the air but nature's winged weeds and flowers?

The medicinal spirits of the air are gentle sunshine and soft breeze.

Many sing to the breaking chords of their hearts; many dance to the fever of their pain. The blind world condemns, but the audience of Heaven applauds the sight of unselfish heroism.

The rain-drops of adversity soften the good soil of the heart and awaken sleeping plants and flowers there; but hard soil they make harder still.

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You that have tasted every sin—you that have drunk of every sorrow—the more you have sinned and suffered, the more should you pity mankind.

It is not what I was; it is what I am now: yesterday I may have been an outcast, but my soul is clean to-day; and no man has a right to condemn me for a past God has taken away.

# The Poet



## PERSONS

EDWARD DEANE, Poet and lawyer

WILLIAM DEANE, His cousin

ESTHER McCLAIN, A school-teacher

SCENE: *A lawyer's office in Louisville,  
Kentucky.*

TIME: *Autumn of 1907.*

*The scene is a small room scantily furnished. In front of a desk, a reclining chair. In the corner, a small bookcase, with many empty shelves.*

(EDWARD DEANE comes into the room.)

EDWARD. Tired, tired, and discouraged (*throwing himself into the chair*)! That is the gloomy truth. At least be honest with myself, and rest from irksome pretense. To say, in answer to the inane question, "How's the book?" "Why, very well; the sales are fair" even while I

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wonder if a single copy has been sold, besides the ones that love and friendship bought—my mother, Will, and she,—is a weary part to play. My mother—bless her dear old-fashioned shawl! —I found a volume underneath its folds; impish perversity did lead me there to break the dream I had of some book-lover touched by my thoughts that spoke to him or her. Dear, generous hearted Will ordered a dozen copies, and she whose name I cannot utter without trembling, did the same; and they would buy them all, had they the means to do so, these three and only stars of my life's night. Well, I have failed, as poet and as lawyer, could the failures for a moment be compared. It was mistaken choice that made me lawyer, but poet was thrust on me with my birth—a burden, vice, incurable disease; I could not help but dream and write, whether I would or no; I could not help but struggle, suffer, hope, and make mistakes, and fail. What's this (*picking up a letter*)? The rent is long past due, and I must settle by this week, or else vacate. Here is another, the telephone service will be discontinued, if the bill's not paid to-morrow. Well, that will keep my creditors from calling me up; not such a bad threat, that. And yet again; the printer's account—for letters

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that brought no return—will be turned into a lawyer's hands; another wasted letter for a lawyer. Crows—crows of adversity! how they flock around and croak in blackest numbers when the heart is always saddest! Did they but know how I would love to pay them! to hurl the coin into their ravenous maws, and let them gorge themselves until they burst their pouches! and how the spirit of my independence is stabbed each time I pray for lenity! They surely know that poets have no money, or lawyers either, until they are old and broken; success will come to neither without death—death to the poet's body, death to the lawyer's heart; and I'm still young in years as years are counted, and my sympathy still lives; how can I have money? Ah me, that pain again, that almost stops my breathing! yet not so sharp as each day's disappointment or as the sword-thrust sensitiveness feels. To be compelled to bend your head, when you are itching to raise your hand, to make excuses when your arm would strike, to utter pleas for mercy and swallow the curses on your lips—these are torments of the damned unconceived by the genius of Dante! And I can understand too well—too bitterly well—that desperate sensitiveness would rather sell its very soul than beg.

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That pain! that pain! each time it leaves me weaker. Perhaps it is the warning bell of death. Well, let it warn; for what else could I do? I am a poet, with a poet's tragedies. I could not help but do that which I did; I could not help but dream, and with my dream eyes stumble upon earth, and choose the hardest road in life to earn a living—that of a lawyer with a poet's heart.

But what is it that makes life fascinating even in its greatest pain, but the faces that I love and that do hover o'er me constantly—my mother's, Will's and hers; and therefore life, with all of its sharp ills, is precious till those faces fade away. Ah me! Ah me! the hopes and dreams I had of them, that some day—some day—we could dwell together, she as my wife and heart-mate, angel and guiding star,—with her, my adored mother, and loyal Will. With love and friendship at my side, could earth give greater treasure? But oh, that dream is fading, even with my life! That pain again, and its succeeding weakness! but a few more such, to strike the fatal blow. She always understood me—my moods and my emotions—oh, the celestial happiness in being understood! But I locked my soul's words from her, waiting for the golden hour when fortune

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would become weary of hurling stones at me, and instead throw a few roses; but fortune never changed her whim, and the stones fall thicker and faster; and so for the very sake of love, I must keep the words of love I would utter, buried.

(*The telephone rings.*) Another croaking crow! Well, I might just as well answer, or it will be flapping its wings up here. (*Walking totteringly to the phone.*) Is it you, Will? Am I busy? What a joke! I wish I were. What is the matter with my voice? Why, nothing whatever; it must be the fault of the phone. You'll be at my office in a few minutes? Wait for you? Of course, you know I will.

(*Walking, almost falling on the way, back to the chair.*) The dear old boy! with his discerning sympathies! He knew at once I was not well, and I have but to let slip a little word about my troubles, and he would be emptying his purse at once to help.

(*Enter WILLIAM DEANE, hurriedly.*)

WILLIAM. I hurried up as fast as I could, for I have only a short time to stay. I want to talk to you about a little matter—I want to ask a favor of you. But stop! I had better not worry

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you about it now ; you don't look well ; how pale, old man, you are ! What you need is a rest, my boy ; you've been working too hard on your book ; what you need is a rest and fresh air.

EDWARD (*aside*). I will soon have plenty of rest. (*Aloud.*) I am not sick, Will ; you know I never have been strong. But tell me about this favor ; you know it is granted even before it is asked.

WILLIAM. It is this, old boy ; you are a poet, and I know from the tone of your book that you understand such things as sentiment and love, though you may not be in love yourself, and a man can talk to you as he could not talk to others, for he might be regarded by them as a fool. I know this—that you'll not laugh at me, and that you'll help me if you can. I'm in love, boy, and I need your good wishes and help.

EDWARD. Dear old boy (*grasping WILLIAM's hand*) ! How happy you make me ! I've been thinking about you all day, and on that very subject ! What an ideal companion to a sweet girl you would be ! There is no reason why you should not marry, you with your fine strong health and common sense, and affectionate disposition, and with financial means to take care of a good wife. Whoever she may be, I know

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that she is worthy of you, for your affections could not lead you astray; and if she loves you, too, as I am sure that she must do, do not loiter, but seize your happiness at once.

WILLIAM. I have never told her that I loved her; I believe she cares for me, but I am not sure. I have known her for several years, but when I would attempt to express my feelings, she would always change the subject, or seem not to understand.

EDWARD. Don't you know women better than that, old man? They love to be pursued; they always pretend not to understand in order to make the wooer desperate. Do not falter, old man—do not falter; tell her your happiness, your life itself depends upon her answer, and I'm sure that you'll receive the answer that you crave.

WILLIAM. That is what I want you to do for me. Be a good fellow, and help me out. You know her in a way even better than I do; you understand each other so thoroughly; you have so often talked and read poetry together, and have congenial sympathies. You with your poetic and tactful tongue could say a few opportune words for me and discover whether or not I should meet with a rebuff did I open my heart to her.

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EDWARD (*aside*). There is only one that he can mean; my last and brightest dream is fading. (*Aloud, but faintly.*) It is Esther McClain, you mean?

WILLIAM. Who else but her? I did not think it necessary to mention her name. But I'm a brute to trouble you just now; you're sick, old man. What can I do for you? Let me call a cab and take you home.

EDWARD. And worry my poor mother? (*Aside.*) Yet it had best be so; my love which in this world I never can enjoy must not be known to her or anyone at all. He'll take good care of her and make her happy, and end her drudging life of teaching. (*Aloud.*) In the pigeon hole there in my desk is a small bottle of ammonia water; spill a few drops upon my handkerchief, and spread it on my forehead—that feels good; I'm better now. Yes, I will speak to Esther for you, Will, and open for you the door of her heart.

WILLIAM. You are the best old fellow in the world. I must be going now, but I'll be back promptly at six; and promise me that you will wait for me and we'll ride home together.

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EDWARD. You can depend upon it, Will; I'll wait till you return.

(WILLIAM DEANE *goes out.*)

EDWARD. Well, if I can't be happy myself, I can at least make others happy. That is all that the failed can do. (*He hears a knocking at the door.*) What new crow of adversity? I cannot cope with it now. Let it croak until it breaks its throat. (*Sinking back in his chair and closing his eyes.*)

(*Enter* ESTHER McCLAIN.)

ESTHER (*aside*). How deathly pale he is! It is well that I have come. "Always trust your emotion," says Emerson. I should have obeyed its voice before this. I am afraid to startle him. I have been told that if you look steadily at sleepers, they will awaken.

EDWARD. Am I dreaming in the world of life or world of death?

ESTHER (*kneeling down beside EDWARD and clasping his hand*). Do not speak in that way, Edward; of course, you are in the world of the living, and looking in the face of one who understands you as no one else on this earth can ever do. Awake—but not from your dreams, for you are a poet, and cannot help but dream—but from

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the dark shadows of sleep-land. I have been thinking about you all day long. You remember how we have talked about these strange mysterious things, and agreed that the thoughts of congenial spirits could converse with each other more readily than tongues?

EDWARD. There's no doubt about that; there's no doubt about that. (*Aside.*) That is why I kept my thoughts of her buried.

ESTHER. We therefore can speak frankly with each other, for we understand one another's heart. And it is of your heart that I wish to speak; that is why I came here, Edward.

EDWARD. My heart is composed solely of my love for my friends, my three friends that alone brighten my life.

ESTHER. It is composed of one more substance; of love, of yearning, burning love, above all the friendship-love you speak of, for the responsive love of a woman—of your soul companion. You know it, Edward; you know that to be true; and from foolish pride alone do you struggle to conceal it, and burn your life away. There's one you love; you have betrayed it in your writings—in every line of sorrow and of joy. There's one you love, for whose sympathetic

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warmth your heart and life itself are freezing, dying.

EDWARD (*aside*). To fight my fiercest battle when I am weakest! (*Aloud.*) You should write poetry yourself, Esther.

ESTHER. I would rather live poetry than write it, and that is what I want you to do. You are pale; you are ill; you need rest and change of scene. Throw your musty theories away and live your natural dreams. I understand it all; I have understood it longer than you thought I did; I am your friend, and a woman, and you need not speak to let me know. You own but little of the world's goods; what is called material success does not come early in life to poets; you are fretted with the annoyances of debt, and your health is not of the strongest. But a woman who truly loves does not look on these things as obstacles, when she appreciates the abilities of him she loves, and her supreme happiness would consist in assisting him to bear his troubles, and in aiding him to ascend from them; her sympathy would soothe and strengthen him, and give to his courage, warmth. Such a woman, I am sure, is the woman that you love, and who, I am sure, loves you. Besides, I want to tell you that I have heard glorious news of your book. Professor

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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David spoke enthusiastically about it and so did Miss Adams of the *Louisville Times*, who said it was a genuine work of art, and that it was only a question of time before it would be recognized by the most fastidious of critics. So you see what brilliant prospects lie before you; there is no reason for discouragement. You have courage, but what is needed more than courage is the inspiring sympathy of a woman's devoted heart.

EDWARD (*aside*). The sweetest moment of my life, just as its door is closing. And oh, my promise to Will!

ESTHER. I could not help but talk to you as I have been doing; I have been thinking about you, Edward, all day long. I want you to tell me about it; I know what is troubling you, Edward, more than your financial worries or your pain. It is the love of a woman you are suffering for, whose love, were it not for your false pride, would be yours.

EDWARD (*aside*). Did I fail now, my failures would be without redemption and baseness inscribed upon my empty scroll. (*Aloud.*) Esther, you have always been one of my truest friends, and with my precious mother and dear Will, the only gold that life has given to me. But above that friendship-love I have no other, unless it be

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my love for poetry, which I cannot help but have, for poetry is my nature, my sorrow, my heaven, my hell; and as a poet—you always said I was a true one, Esther—I can only love as poets always do, and beyond that golden friendship's love for mother, Will, and you, my love is shadow love alone—dream woman, dream companionship—creatures of fancy, no more. So the woman you speak of that I yearn for, I never have seen in this world; I have never loved in the way you so poetically picture, and it is not in my nature to love so.

ESTHER (*aside*). There are lies that are holy, parts we play that are divine. (*Aloud.*) How selfish I have been, dear Edward! worrying you with my chatter while you are so ill. Let me send at once for a doctor, or if you prefer, let me take you home in a cab.

EDWARD. You worrying me with your talk, dear Esther, when your every word is sweetest music to my soul! This is all that I want you to do for me—do not leave me until six o'clock; it cannot be far from that now; you can tell by the court house clock; and after that you can send for the doctor and do with me what you will. Yes, we have often talked about these things, these beautifully mysterious things,—of thought

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language between congenial souls—of sympathetic hearts beholding from afar the pictures in each other's reveries, and showing each other's yearnings and emotions. And so it has been with us, dear Esther; you beheld the picture in my reveries of him, my friend and kinsman—William Deane—whom as brother I could no more love—burning his life away for the woman you so picturesquely describe—the woman who would care nothing for lack of health or the poverty of her soul companion and who would transfer his life into heaven. It was the picture of my dreamings that impressed itself on you, dear Esther; soul visions are greater than science; it was the picture of Will longing for you. There is something else I wish to tell you, Esther. I do not believe that we ever talked about it before, but it is another one of those mysterious truths which never can be explained. It is this, dear Esther, it is this; that at times, unknown to ourselves, love for another is concealed in our heart, and that is the reason of that other's love for us which we can not for a while understand. For love has a secret language of its own and flashes forth messages of which our thoughts may not be aware. Will you promise to look into your heart for the love which has

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been communing with the love in the heart of Will?

ESTHER (*aside*). And must it then be so? I cannot share his love on earth, but I can share his sacrifice, and take up the cross he is about to lay down? (*Aloud.*) I understand it all. I promise you that I will search for the love which you say is concealed in my heart for Will.

EDWARD (*feebly*). The clock strikes six, does it not? You can send for the doctor now, if you will.

(ESTHER hastens toward the phone.)

(*Enter WILL.*)

WILL (*unperceiving ESTHER*). How are you feeling now, old fellow?

EDWARD. I kept my promise, Will. I opened the door of her heart for you. Do not fail to always keep it open.

ESTHER. Doctor James will be here in a moment, and I ordered a cab to take you home. Oh, Mr. Dean! Will! I'm so glad you have come. I am afraid that he is very ill!

(*Almost instinctively, ESTHER and WILL kneel down at the side of EDWARD, clasping each other's hands.*)

EDWARD. I am glad that you both are here. You say that I need a rest. I am going to take

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it now. I am going to travel. Will you look after my dear mother while I am gone? Tell my landlord that I am vacating my office. Call up the telephone company and tell them that they can discontinue their service at once. Tell the printer that he can take his judgment against me, and gain out of it whatever he can. I am going to abandon the practice of law forever. I am going to devote myself to the life of poetry which I had always hoped and dreamed to do. I have gathered a few vines and flowers from the garden of pain and adversity, and I am going to take them along with me—that is all that I have to take along—to lay at the feet of Poetry. I can give you nothing, dear friends—nothing as parting souvenirs. All that I have is mortgaged or at the pawn shops; see the empty shelves of my book-case? I leave nothing here but the gold of love and friendship, which will return to me.

# The House of Tragedy



## PERSONS

MARY DE HAVEN

FRANCIS ST. CLAIR

AUNT EDITH

JEAN LEBREE

## ACT I

SCENE I: *The sitting room of a large old-fashioned house, in a wild and hilly part of Kentucky.*

TIME: *Summer of 1905.*

(MARY DE HAVEN is sitting before a small table, on which a lamp is dimly burning, in deep and brooding revery.)

The ways of life are very strange; I cannot understand them; though I have lived these thirty years, they are always stranger,—stranger. Why is it I must shun mankind, liked a banned and hunted felon—I who could never harm a

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weed, even though I wished to do it? Why is it, I must bear the brunt of my family's weird calamity, and spend my days guarding the door of a skeleton in the closet? I've never known a joyous hour; I've never known careless childhood; from infancy, I've borne the load of this household's heavy tragedy. The clock strikes nine; 'tis almost gone, the twentieth anniversary of the entrance into this sad home of the horrible dark spectre. Can I forget that awful night—those hell-conceived moments—when my father, with face of the damned, made the appalling announcement, that my mother had brought into the world a frightful, living child-monster! I can hear myself, with horror-chilled voice, repeating the oath dictated by my father to conceal forever from all human knowledge, the nightmaric curse that had befallen our proud house. I can see the country vehicles and rigs following the hearse that bore away my mother; I can feel the gruesome secret bound and fettered by my father, Doctor Bates, my aunt, and me. I can hear the rapid building of a tower on the center of the roof of this old house; I again see it turned into a padded chamber, and into a guard-house for the unwelcome freak. I hear my father's cry of satisfaction—it sounded like a

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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fiend's laugh o'er a prize—when word came to us early one cold morning that Doctor Bates during the night had died. I see my father, with ghoulish expression, scanning the faces of my aunt and me when ill, as though he were unnaturally waiting for death to help him screen his wounded pride. I see my home becoming isolated, thanks to its strange inhospitality; I feel the presence of dread and suspicion, and each visitor regarded as a spy.

I feel the hour of ghastly relief when my father's bleeding body reached the spot where I now sit reviewing the unhappy scenes that memory forces on my fevered brain. Following with frenzied fear a shadowy figure born of his mad delusion, nothing more, he fancied peeping through the parlor door, he stumbled on the track and met his doom by being crushed beneath the midnight train. A sickening, hideous, and unnatural sensation, that of a parent's death bringing no tears! Could there be a more uncanny fate than mine! A child not able to weep o'er its father's bier!

*(Aloud.)* Is that you, dear Aunt? I thought I heard a door. These memories play havoc with my nerves. It is a wonder that I am not mad as the wild creature in the tower above.

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There are saints in this dark world uncanonized, allied nearer to angels than to men. Aunt Edith is one of those holy beings; a halo must invisibly crown her head. What other man or woman can you dream of, who, for the love of a dead sister, gave up life and happiness to a tomb forever—the tomb of guardianship over a family's shame! Who else, but her, would tend and feed a monster—simply because it was a sister's child—a monster with the body of a woman, but with the head and features of a brute—one that instead of speaking, snarls and barks, and must be clad in leather lest it rend its flesh and clothes? Day after day for twenty harrowing years—devoted to her task as to a shrine! I thought I heard its bark out in the garden—that bark that brings me visions of unholy sights and deeds—that bark that all these years two lonely women hid from the ears of all—except from one! Yes, there is one that understands our secret; of this I'm as certain as I know I breathe; and one who venerates and respects its keeping, and watches o'er it faithfully as we. Seven years ago, only a short while after death put to rest my father's troubled mind, he came, and gently prayed for the position of gardener upon this dreary place. I met him first on a trip

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to the village; he held my horse before the country store—a raw-boned youth, but with eyes of a dreamer that flashed forth glances of mysterious depths. His voice was low, but of melodious vigor; he asked me where he might find certain books; I told him that I had them in my book case, and I brought them with me to the village the next day. I never can forget the strong impression that overpowered me, as he poured forth grateful words, that at that moment I had won the friendship of one in whom I could trust my life and soul. So when he came to plead for the position, I knew he came to favor more than sue; I felt that he was sent for our protection, a guardian angel o'er this house of misery; and from that hour I felt he knew our secret, and treasured it as sacredly as we, and by invisible means helped us to hide it, and kept a vigil o'er it constantly. And even now, I know the lamp is burning in his cabin, as it has burned these seven years, like an altar light (*looking out the window*). Yes, yes, I see it shining! and it will shine till break of day. But though a lamp burned at your every window, it would not give the light that your eyes send, Jean Lebre, through my dark and troubled memories like beacon rays to a storm-tossed ship at sea.

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(Enter AUNT EDITH, tottering and holding her hands to her head. She sinks on her knees at Mary's feet.)

AUNT EDITH. It was not my fault! it was not my fault! I could not help it! No, I could not help it!

MARY (*throwing her arms about her aunt's neck and kissing her passionately*). Your fault, dear aunt! your fault, dear saint! No matter what may have happened, it could not be your fault! Brave, patient, self-sacrificing, angelic Aunt Edith! No, no, no, no, no, no! If it be the fault of any one at all, it must be surely mine—mean, thoughtless, selfish creature that I have been! always complaining of my lot in life, and not helping you to bear yours!

AUNT EDITH (*slowly, and with difficulty*). After all these years—these twenty years—and on this night, that it should have happened! I felt a numbness stealing over me—I must have fallen asleep—I left the key in the door—I never had done so before—in the inner side of the tower-room door. When I last looked at her, she seemed to be asleep. I awoke with a pain in my head—my brain felt like it was burning—burning—I could barely move my limbs—I have felt those strange spells before, but I did not

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wish to worry you about them, Mary. When I looked about, she was not there. I almost crept on my knees down the stairs, and made search in all the rooms for her—but I could not find her anywhere. She is gone, and after all these years—these fearful years—the awful secret will be known to all the world!

MARY. Do not worry, dear aunt! we will surely find her. She cannot have gone far—she does not know where to go.

AUNT EDITH. But I can give you no help; all my strength is taken from me. I feel as though struck by a fatal blow. And I must soon leave you—Oh, my poor, precious Mary! to bear that dreadful life and secret of this tragic house alone!

MARY (*assisting her aunt to a lounge, and tenderly placing her in a recumbent position*). Listen, dear aunt! it is time I must tell you; but do not break my heart by speaking of leaving me! We have long had a friend, silent and devoted, who knows of our secret, and treasures it as we. Not a word has he uttered; he has never intruded, but has quietly protected us day after day. You know whom I mean? Jean Lebreë, the gardener—you always have liked him—I can call him at any need.

AUNT EDITH (*faintly, as if falling asleep*). And

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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he can give you better help than I can give you. For I'm so tired now, Mary—so very, very tired.

MARY (*walking toward the window*). I did not think the time so near when I should have to call him. (*Calling out the window.*) Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean!

(*Enter JEAN LEBREE.*)

JEAN. Do not try to explain it. I understand it all. I have long known your secret, and you know that I know it. Your charge has escaped? Do not be uneasy about her. I will bring her back to the tower in a very little while. You trust me, Miss De Haven? The boy you befriended, in the time of his loneliness? the time of his need?

MARY. Yes, I know that you know it, and helped us to hide it. But 'tis not I that befriended you; 'tis you that befriended me. It was only a while since that I was thinking of you as a sentinel guarding this house of distress.

JEAN (*eagerly*). And in those thoughts you trusted me, Miss DeHaven?

MARY. Even with my life.

JEAN (*suddenly*). But first of all, look to your aunt, Miss DeHaven. I see that she is very, very ill. Let me call up the doctor over the country

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phone, and tell him to bring his wife along. It is not right that you should be alone in this hour of sickness and trouble.

MARY (*dazedly, kneeling beside her aunt on the couch, and caressing her face and hands*). Yes, call for the doctor and have him bring his wife along; she is a good woman. Yes, Jean, I trust you.

JEAN (*aside, as he opens the door*). Even unto death! for you, for you! you, that gave to me my soul!

SCENE II: *The same.*

(MARY DEHAVEN, JEAN LEBREE.)

JEAN. She is safe in the back room of my cabin, now. I gave her a heavy opiate; she is fast asleep. She will not awaken until afternoon, and when all is quiet, I'll bring her back to the tower-room.

MARY. She cannot be brought back for several days. Aunt Edith passed away an hour ago. The doctor has gone, but his wife is still upstairs, and there will be people about the place until the funeral is over. Oh Jean, Jean! what this house has brought on you! Better flee from it forever, lest its curse overpower you! (*Sinking upon the lounge, and covering her face with her hands.*)

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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JEAN. Miss DeHaven, believe me, even as I know you trust me, the only happiness of my life has been connected with this house. I never knew my parents; they died when I was a baby soon after they reached the shores of this country, and I was left to the grudging care of an aunt. My childhood passed away without affection; I was taught but little more than to read and write; I was sent out into the world to earn a living, at an age when I should be at school in the infant class. One day, at the factory where I was working together with an army of children slaves, I was told that my services were no longer needed, and in a rage, my aunt turned me away from her door. So I wandered, cold and hungry, through the streets of Louisville, until I was arrested for the crime of having no home; the police court judge was about to send me to an institution, when a man in the court room offered me a home—a nice home, as he expressed it, in the country; but what the man meant was, he needed a drudge. The judge gave me a lecture and a warning, but nothing at all to soothe my hunger pains; I became a farmer's little beast of burden, treated as though I were without heart, mind, or soul, and moulded, like so many other farm boys, into a sullen animal,

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no more; until I reached the age of nearly eighteen, when I left the farm and became a clerk in the country store. And to that store I can at least be grateful, though my life there was little brighter than on the farm, for it was there I found on sale several school-books, and at night when the village slept, I read them through. But these books did simply make me discontented; I was fast becoming a misanthropist; I looked with bitterness upon all human beings; the spirit of anarchy was blazing in my breast. Then suddenly, a new world opened to me, the light of which charmed my dark moods away; I still looked upon life with eyes of sadness, but with the sadness born of higher views. You entered on the scenes of my heart's anguish, an inspiration that awakened me from hell, and from the very moment that I saw you, the star of hope began to illumine my career. Bright, mystical intelligence flashed through me that life is a tragedy, but tragedy of height, that each one on this earth must have a mission, and that peace consists in being true to it, though that mission be to hang upon the cross. This was the creed I read in your expression; this was the creed you practiced day by day; this was the creed that enveloped you in ermine, and made your every

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step that of a queen. Strong yearning took possession of my dreamings to be a little worthy of that creed, to be prepared to carry out my mission to which I eventually would be called. That is why I asked you how to obtain the classics referred to in the school-books at the country store. Then with your face in vision ever before me, I waited for the hour of my call. Seven years ago, that expectant hour came. Sheepville was burning with the news of your father's violent death, and the gossips were holding high revels. Marvelous were the tales that were told of no one being invited to enter the house, of no servant remaining long on the place, and of hidden, mysterious crimes. But in the midst of this babble, I could see only this—two brave, helpless women in an unpopular site guarding a sacred tragedy, misunderstood by the world and alone. I came here, and my life began. I did not seek to know the sorrow you were hiding; I simply tried to aid you in your heroic work. That is why I kept a vigil on all pathways to the house, ever ready to give warnings of a visit; that is why my lamp stood burning at my window every night, as a sign that help was near in case of need.

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MARY. Yes, yes! that lamp! that precious lamp! how often in my troubled sleep did I bless it!

JEAN. Unsought by me your secret was unfolded. One summer night at about the hour of ten, I thought I heard a footstep in the garden; I followed a shadow to the side entrance door; and as I stood concealed in the grape arbor, to see which way the trespasser had gone, I saw the door quietly open, and your tragedy stalk out into the night. You were stealthily giving your charge a daily airing; your aunt was gently leading her by the arm, and you upon the other side was watching and listening to detect intruding sight or sound. I knelt, almost fearing to breathe, lest I disturb you, in the arbor while you led your skeleton in the closet to and fro; and from that time, every night saw me invisible guardsman, ready with my blood, if necessary, to defend your secret from mortal eye. This, Miss DeHaven, has been my happiness—the only happiness I ever have known—to assist in relieving the sorrow of this house, and if it needs be, to die for it.

MARY. My God! My God! I did not think of that! Suppose that some one saw you carry-

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ing away the body of old Matilda, and should accuse you of having committed the crime!

JEAN. The truth would be silenced forever then; so much the better for that.

MARY. O no, no, no, no, no! Anything but that! anything but that! There surely must be some other way—some other means; God would never be so cruel as that! But tell me. O tell me! O Jean, do tell me! you are sure there was no one about?

JEAN. To see who killed poor old Matilda? None but I saw the deed; on my knees I could swear to that.

MARY. But to see you carrying away the dead body? Are you as sure, Jean—are you as sure, Jean,—of that?

JEAN. I was not so careful to be assured about that as I was to be certain that none but I witnessed the deed.

MARY. But was there much light at the time? Could it have been seen from afar? At what time, did you tell me, it happened?

JEAN. It must have been near to three o'clock. All night I was tracing her through the woods, over the farm. She had the subtle movements of the fox, and were it not for her snarl and bark, I never could have found her. The dawn was

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slowly peeping over the knob, when I heard her snarl, like a furious dog's, by the barn; when I rushed there, she was on the back of Matilda, choking the old woman to death. I could release her grip only by clutching her throat, and I was wondering what I could do with her, when she began to snatch the eggs out of the basket at Matilda's feet, which Matilda had just been gathering.

MARY. The poor old darky! Our vices make our fate. For many years she has been in the habit of stealing eggs, and for that purpose she came so early to the barn. But you were saying, she began to snatch the eggs?

JEAN. And to greedily devour them, shells and all; it is evident for that reason she attacked the old woman. I had no trouble at all in leading her into the cabin, she swallowing eggs all the time.

MARY. We never could give her eggs enough, and she always would snatch them out of our hands; the sight of the eggs, no doubt, enraged her.

JEAN. So I left her in the cabin still swallowing eggs; I burned the basket, and barred all doors and shutters; then I hurried back to look after Matilda. There was no doubt at all of her

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being dead; she had died without a struggle; the attack was so fierce and deadly.

MARY. Thank God, she did not suffer then! the poor old soul! she did not suffer! How gladly I would have given her all the eggs upon the place!

JEAN. There was but little weight to old Matilda. I carried her easily to the shed over the old well—the well that has been dry for years, and which no one has occasion to visit. After the funeral, I will bury the body.

MARY. I know not what to do; I know not what to say. I can give you no help at this moment. I can only pray you to promise me this—be careful, Jean, be careful. (*Clasping JEAN by the hand.*)

JEAN. I promise you that even unto death, I will keep watch over this house's tragedy. (*Leaving the room slowly.*)

MARY. He does not understand! He will not understand! O God, have mercy, mercy! (*Sinking on her knees.*) Hear me, O God! If there must be more misery, more pain and sorrow flowing from this house's awful curse, let it shower on my head alone—on mine, on mine, the last and solitary member of this unhappy family, and on none other! Let the martyrdom be all

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mine, and mine alone! O God, have mercy, mercy! Hear me, O God! Hear me, if you can, shade of my wretched father! I will be true unto the last unto my fearful oath that turned my childhood into unnatural age and all my being into a ghastly sepulchre, though it inflict upon me purgatorial torments, and hell in frightful and abhorrent manner! I will be true! be true! But I will not, while there is breath within me—while I have power to speak, write, make a single sign, permit an innocent soul to suffer for this tragedy! If there be no other way, I will declare that I myself did commit the murder, and if it needs be, die for it! Here on my knees, I swear it, God! Here on my knees, I swear it!

SCENE III: *The same.*

(MARY DEHAVEN, *alone.*)

MARY. And so it had to come. There is no other way. He must not suffer for his loyalty. The body has been discovered, and suspicion falls on him; and now, at any moment, I must swallow the bitterest dregs of my fate. (*Walking to the window.*) And there he is, still working in the garden, unmindful of the lowering storm. There seems to be a smile upon his countenance, an illumination of triumphant peace. Those people

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—what are they doing here? They pass him with insolent gait. And, O God! there is the sheriff under the old beech tree, as if he were owner of the place! and talking to him, St. Clair! Francis St. Clair! How I always despised him, with the sinister look he would cast at me, as if there were a guilty secret between us; and especially on the funeral day, what uncomfortable feelings overpowered me, when he extended his sympathy! What a leering expression he had in his eye! Can he be at the bottom of this? He has a large following of his kind; a lawyer of no mean ability, with a manner that pleases the masses, but devoid of all honor or principle, and without a penny in his pocket that he has earned. His father I hear has disowned him, and he lives by his perverted wits. They are pointing to the house. The sheriff hands him a paper; he is coming to the door. The hour is now at hand; God, give me strength and courage and power to know how to act, to save, and at the same time to be true! (*Seating herself on the lounge.*)

(*Enter FRANCIS ST. CLAIR.*)

FRANCIS. I knocked at the door, but you did not hear me, and so I just came in. I thoroughly understand your nature; you are one of the most sensible women that ever lived; and for years you

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have had a difficult part to play, and you played it admirably. You are quick to grasp a point at issue; I feel very certain of that; and only a few words will be necessary to exhibit to you a few bare facts. I am only a soldier of fortune, without a cent in the world of my own; my people have cast me off from their bounty, and I am at present without a home, and I have only my brains to live by and to feed on opportunity. And here is an opportunity that greets me—to give me a clever wife and comfortable home. I have eyes bright enough to locate it, and wit enough to master it. What is troubling you now is the question how to continue to hide and to save; how to keep on concealing your skeleton that walked out of the closet one night and proceeded to make black mischief, for which an innocent person is blamed, and at the same time to protect that blameless person from all suspicion of guilt.

MARY (*aside*). It is money that he wants. I have no ready cash—but there is my mother's diamond brooch, and Aunt Edith's rings and necklace—and I could put a mortgage on this land.

FRANCIS. Yes, here is the opportunity that boldly presents itself and there is no possible

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chance of my failing to seize it. I am placed in the happy position of being the only person who can help you in your dilemma—of being able to save the young gardener and to preserve your family secret. I am a lawyer, you know, and not such a bad one, but even though I were a bad one, that would make little difference in this county, where all that is needed to win a case is to possess the favor of the officers of the court—which I most assuredly do possess, as any one in the neighborhood would inform you. It is as easy for me to acquit as to convict; and here is a warrant of arrest for Jean Lebreë, on the grounds of a reasonable suspicion that he is the murderer of old Matilda. I am convinced that he is innocent of the crime; I know that it was committed by your skeleton in the closet of which no one in the world ever dreams, excepting the romantic French gardener and myself. But he will be easily acquitted, if I should take charge of his case, and not tell that I saw him carrying away the body of Matilda to the shed of the old dry well.

MARY. He did not commit the deed! I swear it! I swear it!

FRANCIS. You would have no one accuse him of having committed the deed, nor would you have your skeleton in the closet exposed.

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MARY. It is an attorney's fee that you wish me to pay you? I have no cash on hand, but I could give you my note, which you could easily discount.

FRANCIS. I aim a little higher than that, Miss DeHaven; an attorney's fee would not last me very long. As I said before, I want a clever wife and a home; I am tired of my stray dog career—I want to settle down and manage an estate—a laudable ambition, I am sure. I admire you, Miss DeHaven; I have long admired you; I like this place. I want to be its manager, and make profit out of it for us both—for you, as my wife, and for myself. Clearly a splendid, business-like arrangement, this; in return for your hand and a share in your estate, I save the dreamer, Jean, and your secret.

MARY. And in case of my refusal to enter into this remarkable agreement?

FRANCIS. Jean will spend the end of his days in the penitentiary at least, if he does not receive the death penalty, as certain as I am admiring you, and your skeleton will be introduced to the world.

MARY. But stop! you may have miscalculated; your card may not be so very fine. How do you know but that the person who actually killed Matilda may not be ready to confess the crime?

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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FRANCIS. That miserable freak of nature, that only snaps and snarls and that cannot utter a word? I saw your aunt leading her out into the garden many a night before your moon-struck gardener began to act as a guardsman; and I know very well that she escaped from the tower on the night that your aunt died, and it is the most natural thing in the world for me to know how to draw conclusions.

MARY. Suppose it was not she, the freak of nature as you call her (even granted that she wandered away from her room) and that Jean did carry away the body of Matilda, for the sake of protecting the murderess, who was none other than I, who enraged at the old woman's stealing my eggs, struck her harder than I meant to do?

FRANCIS. It is you that have miscalculated; your card is not at all fine. Who would believe your story? It would be thought that you were attempting to shelter your lover. And how would your tale prevent Jean from suffering at least as an accomplice? For he was attempting to conceal the evidence of the crime; and he would be dragged down into the mire of shame with you. Moreover, how could your boasted confession keep your skeleton from being ex-

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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posed? Naturally I should feel a little chagrined over the loss of my coveted opportunity, and have no longer any interest in keeping your skeleton in the closet concealed, or in having your French guard acquitted.

MARY. I did not even dream of such villains as you existing except in story books and plays.

FRANCIS. You may apply that name to me, if you will; but I am nothing more nor less than a clever business man who knows how to seize a favorable opportunity. Thousands of others are doing the same thing every day, though the opportunities they grasp at may be different in color from mine, and they are lauded as being most successful and respectable business people. To make an advantageous contract is their creed; and though I may not be sitting behind a desk, or standing behind a counter, I am a business man as well as a soldier of fortune. Moreover, all of us are playing a game of cards in this world, and the ones that lose call the winner villain.

MARY (*aside*). It is true that I have miscalculated. I can see no other way. My disgrace or death would not benefit Jean, or hide the family shame. But he must leave the place; he must not suffer with me, as I fulfill the contract conceived

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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by hell and necessity. (*Aloud.*) And if I agree to enter into this nefarious contract, what assurance have I that you will keep your word?

FRANCIS. I anticipated that question—a very apt and proper one. The word of a sensible woman is her bond; so, if you agree to enter into this arrangement so advantageous to us both—or rather so necessary to us both—I will at once accompany Lebreë with the sheriff, and act as his attorney, and insist upon immediate trial before the County Judge. There being no legal evidence against the young fellow,—the only evidence against him being withheld—I will make a motion for his instant dismissal, which motion will be sustained; and before to-morrow morning, Jean will be free and acquitted, and at liberty to go where he will. And when you become my wife, why, of course, if for no other motive than that of a little natural pride, I will exert my best endeavors to conceal the one member of the family with which I have become allied, of whom I have no reason to be proud; and I believe that I can afford better assistance in keeping the closet locked than that of the French dreamer; for dreamers have lapses of memory at times, and may forget to turn the key of the door.

MARY. You most assuredly do know your

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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cards, and play them well; I see no way of beating you; but as you have suggested, this is strictly a business arrangement, and is always to be treated as such.

FRANCIS. I understand your meaning; you will never be bored by me with expressions of love. Love is the sick fever of dreamers, such as your French gardener may be afflicted with; you would have more to fear from him in that direction. I have never been troubled with that disease. We will regard each other always as business partners only, looking to our common interests alone.

MARY. There is nothing else for me to do than to become a party to this fiend-conceived contract. As soon as I am certain that Jean Lebree is free and acquitted by your promised assistance, I will marry you.

FRANCIS. That will not be later than tomorrow morning; we can marry quietly on the same day?

MARY. That is for you to say; attend to the necessary arrangements as soon as Jean is acquitted and free.

FRANCIS. I will go at once with Jean with the sheriff. Would you care to speak to him before we go?

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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MARY. You may tell him I wish to see him, and you had better come back with him.

(FRANCIS *leaves the room.*)

MARY (*aside*). I had all kinds of horrible visions about the end of this house's tragedy, but never such a vision as this. This is more dreadful than prison or death, but a surer way than either for the secret and for him—especially for him. But he must go at once away, or there will be greater tragedy.

(*Enter FRANCIS and JEAN.*)

JEAN. You wished to see me, Miss DeHaven?

MARY. You know Mr. St. Clair, my prospective husband? He is a lawyer, and a very adroit one. The sheriff holds a warrant of arrest for you on the absurd charge of your having murdered old Matilda. Mr. St. Clair wishes to act as your attorney; it is my wish that he do so, too. You will be granted an immediate trial, and be acquitted in a very short while. Mr. St. Clair will accompany you to the court house with the sheriff, and save you as much inconvenience as possible. Is not that true, Mr. St. Clair?

FRANCIS. No one will know that you are a momentary prisoner; you will not be compelled to be confined in jail; you will remain at the home of the sheriff as his guest, and be at liberty in a very short time.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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JEAN. If it be Miss DeHaven's wish that I do so, I will accept your service, Mr. St. Clair.

MARY. You could not meet with speedy justice without the aid of an attorney, and you can find no more serviceable one, in this instance, than Mr. St. Clair.

JEAN. Then I am ready to go with the sheriff at any moment.

FRANCIS. Meet me at the gate when you are ready to start. (*Leaving the room.*)

JEAN. I was prepared for another way. Is it yet too late for that? I was prepared to die for you, but instead, shall I live for you?

MARY. Jean, believe me, and trust me, as I have trusted you; this is the only way out; and you must leave this place as soon as the court releases you. This is my wish—my sad heart's wish. Do not ask me wherefore, but go.

JEAN. I ask you only this—is there nothing I can do? My life-blood is ready—imprisonment is ready—is happily ready—if that can save you.

MARY. Could the shedding of blood avail, how gladly would I offer up mine! Could public shame or imprisonment avail, how gladly would I flee to it! No, there is nothing for you to do but to leave this house of misery! This is my wish, my prayer. (*Clasping JEAN'S hand.*)

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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JEAN. Then I will go. But as I said, three days ago, when you bade me promise to be careful, I say again, Miss DeHaven—I say again that I promise that I will keep watch even unto death over this house's tragedy. You said that in your troubled sleep you often blessed the lamp that was burning at my window. While it will not be shining there, it still will be shining—always shining—somewhere—somewhere. Think of it as always shining, always shining as a light to show you that I still am near you, ready at any moment to come to you. You have only to call, even if but in your dreams—you have only to call; always remember that, and if I still be in this world, I will come. (*Leaving the room slowly.*)

MARY. Jean! Jean! There is so much I would say to you. There is so much I could say to you! But you understand—you always did understand—you know what I would say! Oh, never can I fail to see the light of your lamp burning as it used to do, nor fail to find hope and comfort in watching it and blessing it as I used to do!

JEAN. I understand it all. Think of my lamp as forever burning.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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### ACT II

SCENE I: *The same as in Act I.*

(*Enter FRANCIS ST. CLAIR.*)

(FRANCIS approaches a table in the center of the room, and glances over the papers scattered on it.)

FRANCIS. The deed still unsigned! What game can she be up to? Well, she will sign it, and before this night is over, if I have to guide her hand to make her do it. This deal must be settled before to-morrow; I must have the money, and get out of this country; it is growing a little too hot for me here. Of course, I'll have to take her along for a while; but, damn it all! for only a little while. Well, she has no right at all to complain; I kept my part of the contract; her fool lover was freed—I wish they both had been hung together!—and her skeleton in the closet will soon be locked up forever. It is lucky the pony had to die at this time, but it is hard on poor Flossy that they must be buried together; I had many a jolly old fox hunt with her, and it really does not seem that I am treating her right. But it cannot be helped, Flossy, old girl; you must help me out this time as you did many a time before, when I mortgaged you to creep out

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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of scrapes. I might as well finish the dirty work; I'll go up to the tower and tie the skeleton in the sack, and when it gets a little darker, I'll throw her into the unfilled hole with poor Flossy, and cover them up together. (*Leaving the room.*)

(*Enter MARY, from another door. She sits down in the armchair beside the table.*)

MARY. Three years of nightmaric martyrdom have almost passed away. They were more tortuous than I ever dreamed that they would be. The coat of polish that covered his villainy very soon wore off, and exposed the ugly form of vile brutality; selfishness cannot play the part of a gentleman very long; it soon becomes weary of its mask. He did in truth carry out his part of the contract; but how, O God! but how? I did not bargain for brutality. The skeleton in the closet is now silenced forever; but in what way was it silenced, let me not think, or I shall go mad!! And to be buried in this horrible manner! Who, but the prince of fiends could have projected such a scheme as that! To order the negroes to dig the grave for the dead pony, to lower it into the grave, and to partially cover it with earth, and then to bid them leave off the work, and to finish it in the morning! he himself, when it is dark, to lay her in the unfilled grave

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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above the body of the pony and to conceal it with earth from sight. Genius of hell! I never pitied her until now; she is at least a child of this house, and should have decent burial. Instead of the loathing that I gave her, she should have had my tears; for whatever sorrow she brought into this house, she was not to blame for it, while he, with his Satanic intellect, wounds a hundred times a day. Yet, what can I do? I am bound by the inexorable oath of my childhood, of which a devil took advantage. How I hate him! how I hate him! how I hate him! What an existence it has been! what an infernal existence! Dante could have created such a torment for the damned. O God, have mercy on me! it has come at last to this, that I can understand too terribly how murder may be committed; how goaded slaves have killed their masters, wives, their husbands, and how those who hold souls in their power can be assassinated! O God, forgive me! I have felt as they that gave the secret poison or struck the fatal blow to their oppressors, and I can excuse the deed! and I can sympathize with darkest crimes of the mistreated, and applaud their black schemes of revenge! Yet why do I refrain from extinguishing these purgatorial flames? from ending this

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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abhorrent life forever? To do so, I have only to comply with his demand—to sign the deed, dispose of all my property,—by signing my own death warrant. For that is what it means; to sell this place—the cash turned into his hands, and pay him for his service—his extra service of brutality—and then permit him to drop me, as he will soon drop her, into the secret grave. Why do I not sign the deed, and end it all? What power restrains me? Three times to-day did I take up the pen and throw it down again, as though my hand were checked by an invisible presence. Can it be you, spirit of my wretched father, who does not wish to see this property conveyed—these scenes of ghostly horror—into the hands of strangers? Is it you, unhappy father? Is it you? And yet—O, no! unless your nature has entirely changed, you would be gloomily pleased to know the skeleton is no more; and you would be assisting me to reach the end of life, so that the last of this unfortunate house would be unable to reveal the buried curse! O, no! it is not you! it is not you! Instead, if you could do so, you would be helping him to lead me to my doom. Yet I must sign it now. I feel his approaching presence. He has lost his popularity in this county by shameless

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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tricks and schemes, and some things he has done he can be indicted for. There's no way to escape him. He is at the door; I feel it by all the evil arousing within me, and by the fever of my nerves and my bones.

(*Enter FRANCIS.*)

FRANCIS (*picking up the papers on the table, and throwing them down angrily*). What do you mean by this asinine folly? Did I not tell you that I wanted this deal settled by to-night? You have had the whole day to sign the paper, and you have not signed it yet.

MARY (*aside*). Let me not strike him, Lord! Let me not strike him! (*Aloud.*) It seems to me that I should at least be accorded the privilege of taking my time in disposing of all my property.

FRANCIS. What do you mean by that silly remark? We get a good price for it.

MARY. Why use the word we? You are not royal. (*Aside.*) He does indeed wear the ermine of hell.

FRANCIS. Do you know that you are really amusing at times? But you are never so amusing as when for a moment you think that you can thwart my set purpose. Listen to me (*grasp-*

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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ing MARY *by the shoulder*). I have been true to my part of the contract, have I not? I have done even more than I bargained for.

MARY. Yes, there was no agreement about your extra service of brutality.

FRANCIS. If you wanted sentiment, you should have married your fool gardener. But never mind about that now. Who has been keeping watch over that thing upstairs all these years, but I? Who has had to arrange its secret burial, but I? I have had all the dirty work to do.

MARY. Naturally, as your hands were already dirty before you commenced doing the work.

FRANCIS. You were very willing, at least, to seize these dirty hands to help you out of your scrape. Who saved your French guardsman from the penitentiary? By the way, I passed him on the county road yesterday; he looked as lunny as ever.

MARY (*aside*). And so it is he that is holding back my hand! He said that he would be always watching over this house's tragedy! and that his lamp would be burning forever! He knows of this projected conveyance; he knows that it means my doom; and he has been throwing the power of his thoughts toward me, forbidding me to sign the deed. He said he would

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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come at once if I called him, even though I called him in my dreams. But he must not come; he must not influence me; he must not share my sufferings; he must not add to the tragedy of this house. I must not think of him; I must not even dream of him; I will sign the deed, and end this horrible suspense forever.

FRANCIS. You seem to be somewhat excited at the mention of my seeing the gardener. (*Walking toward the window.*) Of course, under the terms of our business-like marriage contract, it does not concern me what kind of relations may have existed between him and you before our marriage, or even after it, for that matter; but let me tell you this; he bores me—(a fool always did bore me; I can forgive a man anything but his being a fool) and if he worries me again with the sight of his presence, I will treat him as I would a pestiferous fly.

MARY (*arising from her chair, and grasping a heavy vase on the mantel*) (*aside*). I could hurl this vase at his head in a moment as he is standing there by the window, and end this nightmare forever! Control me, Heaven! for I can no longer control myself! (*The vase falls with a crash to the floor.*)

FRANCIS. That vase would have brought us at

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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least two dollars at the auction; but if it relieves your very dramatic humor, break up everything in the room. Only, be sure not to destroy the deed; it would cost another dollar to have it type-written again.

MARY (*aside*). I must sign it—and end it all—I must sign it, but I must not yield too easily. (*Aloud.*) Is it not dark enough for you to carry out your plan of the burial? To carry out your final part of the contract? As soon as you have done it, I will pay you in full for your service—your extra service included—by signing the deed.

FRANCIS (*eagerly*). In that case, it will be signed in half an hour. (*Leaving the room hurriedly.*)

MARY. I must sign it! I must sign it! I must sign it! Nothing can save me now! He has gone—I hear the door—with his wretched burden! (*Looking out the window.*) Carrying her as though she were a sack of corn, and his odious pipe in his mouth! She has dwindled down into a shadow. Just so, he will carry me—very soon, yes, very soon, as he is carrying her, at night in some far away spot! O, God! what terror comes over me! I can see him! he has reached the grave—he has already dropped her into it—just so, he will be dropping me, smoking

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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complacently all the while! I hear the earth falling upon her—there is not a sound in the air, not a single star shining—I hear the earth falling upon me—I feel stifled as though in the grave—I feel choked—I am smothering, my brain is leaving me! Alone with my impending doom—O, God, I can bear no more! I can not help it, God! I cannot help it! There is only one in this world who can save me! I have tried not to think of him! I have prayed not to think of him! But I have borne all that a human heart can bear! He said that he would come if I called him—I cannot help but call him now! If I am doing wrong, Heaven forgive me! but without him, I shall go mad! Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean! Jean!

*(Enter JEAN.)*

MARY. Are you an apparition? or, are you still in this life?

JEAN. As yet in this life, as I have been since I last spoke to you; ever watching over this house's tragedy—ever keeping my lamp burning. He is forcing you to dispose of your property? I have been helping you to keep from doing so.

MARY. I know that, Jean—I know that; it was you that prevented my signing it. But it

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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must be signed now, Jean, and in a few moments; I promised him that I would sign it when he had finished the final part of his contract. The skeleton in the closet died yesterday morning, and he is burying it now, under the old white oak at the foot of the hill, and in a dreadful manner—think of it! with his pony!

JEAN. I will assist him in burying the skeleton in the closet forever—in silencing this house's secret forever. (*Leaving the room.*)

MARY. What does he mean? What have I done? My selfishness has invoked the aid of the fiends! I have called him here to suffer with me, and to add to the clouds of my misery! (*Looking out of the window.*) He is walking toward the hill—I dare not call him back! They have met—I hear them talking—I hear a curse—it is St. Clair's curse! My God! there are pistol shots! (*Successive shots are heard.*) Someone is coming up the path! If there must be but one to come back, O God! let it not be St. Clair—forgive me, Heaven, if thou canst—but let it not be St. Clair.

(*Re-enter JEAN.*)

MARY (*sinking upon her knees*). Thank God!

JEAN. The skeleton in the closet is buried now forever. The dark secret of this house is now

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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silenced forever. If you still wish to dispose of your property, you must have the deed rewritten, for you alone are needed to sign it now.

MARY (*arising from her knees, and stretching her hands toward JEAN*). Jean! Jean! My head is bursting—my heart is bursting—my tongue is too paralyzed to utter a word! But you understand—you always did understand—take care! Jean! take care.

JEAN. The tragedy of this house is ended forever. There is no longer any need for me to keep watch over it. There is no longer any need for me to keep my lamp burning. There is nothing any more for me to do. (*JEAN walks toward the door, opens it, turns about and raises his hands toward MARY as though in benediction, looks at her in ecstasy for a few moments and leaves the room.*)

MARY (*tottering toward the door, and opening it*). Jean! Jean! I did not understand it until now—I did not feel it until now! You say the tragedy of this house is ended? Without you, for me the tragedy will have just begun! (*A pistol shot is heard a short distance away. MARY sinks in a swoon to the floor.*)

# The Unwelcome Visitor



## PERSONS

WARWICK DUVOL,	A writer
HAROLD GLENN,	His private secretary
ELAINE,	His daughter
JOSIE,	Elaine's maid
ROBERT GRAY,	A reprobate

SCENE: *Library in the Devol household,  
along the coast of Maine.*

TIME: .1912.

(WARWICK DUVOL and HAROLD GLENN in deep,  
*secretive conference.*)

HAROLD. There is no other way? Money, of course, would simply bring him back again for more, and you ever uneasy. No, money will not do. But only this, I'd say; if naught but death can silence him, why not let the trouble fall on me, instead of upon you?

WARWICK (*grasping HAROLD'S hand*). Unselfish, faithful friend! who for more than twenty

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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years has shared my inmost thoughts and conscience! who knows each spot—each tainted, blackest spot—of my career, and still supports me loyally and tenderly! Had I won nothing else in life than this—this golden friendship set with diamonds, I'd have achieved the greatest wealth that man can gain, and walked a Caesar, though in pauper's rags. No, there's no other way, and none but I must take it. This you can do for me; I know you'll do it; see that my wife is not disturbed at all, or even knows I have a visitor; and keep Elaine and Josie in their rooms; say, I'm in mood to write another story, and must not be disturbed. You have the choicest gift that mortal can be blessed with—tact; use it to-night, my friend, my strength, my wall. To be near, yet not about, to know all, and yet see nothing, this is ideallic friendship rare and true; and that, my friend, is you.

HAROLD. I'm sure—I need not ask—there is no chance to fail.

WARWICK. Unless I lose my senses, there is none. Here is the flask—the same he seized last night, on the same bracket in the corner here. He scented it at once, and with familiarity, he clasped it to his lips. 'Twas then I planned the way of ending him. This flask is filled with

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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brandy to the brim, and with a drug that never fails to kill. He'll seize it quickly, as he did last night, and after he has quaffed it to the brim, I'll have him take a stroll; I'll lead him down the path toward the seaside way, where no one passes more than once a day, and that in early morning. The drug will take effect soon after he is there—just twenty minutes after he has swallowed it! (I tried it on my dog an hour ago) and he is light of frame and easy to roll off the dark, deserted shore; I'll have no trouble in disposing of him when he is dead; it is him living that I fear, and not him dead. Yet I wish it need not be; I do not hate him. Why must he come to disturb me on my way—my bright and glorious way—and cast a shadow over my career that all the world is envying? He is not bad at all in heart or looks; there's something almost lovable in him; I loved him once, for he was kind in many ways to me, and made my life in prison bearable; my fellow prisoner and prison chum was he. But here's his crime; that he comes back to me, and brings with him the life that I would bury, together with the name that I've cast off forever—those memories of the past that none but you do know of, Harold—you, my bosom's confidant, who hides them as deeply as I do myself and just as reverently.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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HAROLD. You say he is not bad; then he's not dangerous; can you not talk with him, explain your fears and feelings, and bid him as he one time loved you, flee from here, your life on which you'd have no shadow fall of memories of the past.

WARWICK. He is not bad, but he is thoughtless and emotional, and loves his drink; thus, far more dangerous a sharer of a secret than were he Satan's imp. Through idle jest, or spoken reverie of the past, or moment's grievance, he'd blurt out at any hour the incidents of his prison life, and comradeship with me; I'd ne'er feel safe while he had tongue to speak or power to write a line; he looks on life as an adventure merely, and in his moods of reckless gayety, would prate of deeds that other men would blush at, and couple mine with his. I've thought of all; there is no other way but the one that I am taking. I think of my career under my present name—the fame of my career which is unspotted, my wife, who dreams of me as almost godlike, my child who looks upon me as her guardian angel, this mansion I've created by the sea, and all the world admiring and waiting for my pen, and then of *him*—of Robert Gray—the sole and fearful *him*—who can throw blackness over all, and cast my glory

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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into ruins by one word of my past. Shall I risk letting *him* live?

(*Enter JOSIE, wildly.*)

JOSIE. Quick! help! she's gone! I know not where! I could not help it! she would have her way! who can resist her pleadings? She would hear what the waves say at eventime. There was a boat—a little row-boat—fastened to the shore! With one leap, she was in it, rocking with the waves that battled to unloosen it! I could not grasp her hand before I saw her floating off—the sea was wild and stormy—I cannot swim—what could I do but wring my hands and scream? And then one came, a stranger with the blackest hair—I saw his hair above the waves—and he seized her in his arms, and swam back to the shore—her light hair pressing his—but she never came back to me! He has gone with her, and I know not where!

WARWICK. There is no time to lose!

HAROLD. I will go with you. We will find her soon.

WARWICK. No, you stay here. You understand. If he should come while I'm away, you must protect my wife from meeting him, and from knowing of this fright. Her heart can stand no shock at all, or care.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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HAROLD. I understand and will not leave the house till you return.

*(He hastens out of the room with JOSIE.)*

HAROLD. Grand, brilliant soul! whom divine spirits guard! why should I fear for you? The gods of genius hover over you with starry guidance; you cannot fall; they will protect you even from yourself, if yourself prove unfriendly.

*(Enter ROBERT GRAY carrying Elaine in his arms. He places the child in an arm-chair, and with a large bandana handkerchief, he dries her face and arms.)*

ROBERT. Now hurry away to mama, and tell her to put dry clothes on you. You're not a bit scared now, are you? Bless me, but you've got your father's eyes.

ELAINE. No, mama must know nothing about it. She is always so nervous, you know. But I'll tell papa all about how you saved me—he's looking for me now, I know. And you'll stay here with us a long time, won't you? and you'll tell me lots of stories like the one you told me when you carried me home? *(Throwing her arms about Robert's neck impulsively.)*

HAROLD *(approaching Elaine, and stroking her head tenderly)*. Your father and nurse are almost distracted about you, and they have hur-

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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ried off to look for you. And this is, no doubt, the gentleman who saved you? (*Shaking hands with ROBERT.*) On behalf of this house, I thank you. Your clothes are wet? I do not think mine will fit you, but I can find you some that you can wear while yours are being dried. Mr. Duval will be here in a moment; I am his secretary. Glenn is my name.

ROBERT. Never mind about my wet clothes; I am used to them; this is not the first time I had a swim. But what I would like to have is a drink. There's some there in the corner, I believe; at least, there was a flask on the bracket there, last night; I helped myself to a good swill.

HAROLD (*fearfully*). You say that you were here last night, and were you expected to-night?

ROBERT. At about this time, I promised to be here. I did not expect to come, however, in this way. By the way, the little lady should change her clothes; you'll get sick, my bird, if you don't take them off right away.

ELAINE. I'll go up on tip-toe to my room and put on others outside in the hall. And when I come back, you'll tell me another story, won't you? What's your name? Mr. Robert Gray?

ROBERT. Call me Uncle Bob. That sounds better. I wish I had a niece like you. (*Kissing*

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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ELAINE, *who runs out of the room.*) How about that little drink, old man?

HAROLD. Do I understand that you are Mr. Robert Gray, the visitor who was here last night, and who was again expected to-night? and you are the stranger with the black hair who saved the child adrift on the boat?

ROBERT. My hair's black enough; did the nurse tell you about it? I almost turned her's gray by the fright I had given her. But when am I to have that little drink?

HAROLD. And when you saved her, did you know whose child she was?

ROBERT. Of course I did; but that does not mean that I would not have done it for another. That drink's coming at a slow trot, I think.

HAROLD. And you were the visitor who was expected to-night?

ROBERT. I told you so. It's good I came; that screaming freak could not swim. (*Arising and walking toward the bracket in the corner of the room.*) There it is! I told you so. Exactly where it was last night.

HAROLD (*standing in front of the bracket*). You mistake; there is nothing in it. Wait until Mr. Duvol returns.

ROBERT. You are evidently not a toper. I can

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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feel that it is filled to the brim. (*Stretching his arm over Harold's shoulder toward the bracket.*)

HAROLD. I tell you there is nothing in it. You say you drank it up. It has not been filled again. (*Seizing the flask, and as he does so, ROBERT'S hand snatches it from him.*)

ROBERT. I don't mean to be rude, old man, but I'm bound to have a drink, and I don't see how it concerns you. (*Opens the flask.*)

HAROLD (*desperately struggling to grasp the flask*). It concerns me this much—this is the only brandy in the house, and it belongs to me. You are nothing to me. I did not invite you to drink.

ROBERT. Of all the yellowness I have ever seen in life! Swill it up! choke on it! I'll be damned!

(*HAROLD goes out hurriedly with the flask.*)

(*Re-enter ELAINE.*)

ELAINE (*jumping on ROBERT'S lap*). Mama did not wake up! and I changed all my clothes! Now, you've got another story for me, Uncle Bob!

(*WARWICK and JOSIE come into the room. They stand a moment in the doorway unobserved by ROBERT and ELAINE. WARWICK seems to be transfixed with conflict of emotions. JOSIE flings herself on her knees before ELAINE and kisses the child passionately.*)

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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ROBERT (*arising from his chair and advancing to WARWICK*). We've become good chums, your girl and I.

WARWICK (*dazedly*). You are the man who saved her, and you knew whose child she was, and you brought her back to me?

ROBERT. Of course I did; why should I not have done so? I told her to call me Uncle Bob. By the way I made her change her clothes.

WARWICK (*gazing anxiously at the bracket*). Has anyone else been in the room?

ROBERT. I should think there was! I never met such a fellow as that! the strangest person! your secretary, he said he was. You remember the drink I had last night? I saw the same flask on the bracket over there, and begged the fellow for a little drink. He said there was nothing in the flask, and when I tried to find out, he snatched it from me, and said it belonged to him!

WARWICK. You say he took it with him? You did not drink a drop?

ROBERT. How in the fiend's name could I? He said he wanted it all for himself.

WARWICK. And did he know who you were? That you were the visitor of last night, and that you were expected to-night? and that you saved my child—and my life?

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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ROBERT. He could not have helped but know it; he asked me about it a dozen times or more.

WARWICK. You had better go to bed now, Elaine; and don't tell your mama about what occurred. Kiss me, and kiss your Uncle Bob, too, and when you say your prayers, thank the dear Lord for sending your Uncle Bob here.

(ELAINE *throws her arms about her father's neck and about ROBERT and kisses them again and again.*)

(JOSIE and ELAINE *leave the room.*)

WARWICK (*advancing toward ROBERT and drawing his arm about him*). Dear boy, do not think hard of Harold; he is one of the best fellows in the world. I have told him everything about you; he meant no harm toward you at all. What he did was done to protect you—especially after what you did for me to-night; I have told him of your single failing—your love for drink, which at times overpowers you. He is stern in his fidelity, no more. (*While he is speaking to ROBERT, HAROLD enters the room, with looks of supreme happiness and peace.*) Is that not true, Harold? Is that not true? And you're going to make your home now with me, are you not, old man?

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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HAROLD. It is true; what I did was in consideration of both of you. I emptied the flask of its contents and threw it away.

ROBERT (*impulsively grasping the hands of WARWICK and HAROLD*). I'll not be a yellow cur! I'll confess what I was about to do. When I carried her back to the shore, I thought for a moment of your being a little cold last night to me, as if you were ashamed of me—I thought of getting even with you—of taking the girl away with me—but when she laid her little head against my cheek, and gave all her trust to me, all the yellowness flew away—and I brought her back fast as I could. You know I've got a devil of a temper, but it does not last very long, and I can't be mean. But you don't want me to stay here now, after what I was going to do.

WARWICK. Indeed I do. Since you have confessed, let me make a little confession, too. I was a little angry last night at you, and wished for a moment something would happen to you; but that mood disappeared just as yours passed away, and the one who saved us both is the child that loves us both, and who re-unites our hearts forever. Harold, I don't think that a little drink would do any of us any harm to-night. You say you have thrown the flask away? The box of

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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wine that I bought a while ago is yet unopened; bring in three bottles, and let us drink to the health forever of friendship and love, the only true glories of life.

# Remorse



## PERSONS

PAUL DEVERE

JACK McKEE

LITTLE PAUL McKEE

SCENE: *Library in the Devere household, in one of the large towns of Kentucky.*

TIME: *Present.*

*The library is furnished with the finest of old-fashioned furniture. Light from lamp on table burns dimly, revealing PAUL DEVERE in dressing gown reclining in an arm-chair, and JACK McKEE, smoking a cigarette, lying on a lounge in one corner of the room, with a little dog cuddled up at his side.*

PAUL: Is the little dog with you?

JACK: Close to my side; he feels the coming storm.

PAUL: I feel its coming, too, with all the ghosts from which I try to flee, the storm always

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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invokes. Give me a bromide, quick! my nerves' only relief—if for an hour only, blessed relief. Poor little dog! my mother loved him so! He kissed her hand even as she passed away, old Tom told me. Would I had died then instead of her!

(JACK arises from the lounge and lays the little dog on PAUL'S lap. He then takes a bromide tablet from a box on the top of the book-case, drops it in a glass of water beside the box, and stirring it with a pen-knife hands the glass to PAUL, who quaffs its contents eagerly.)

JACK (placing his arm about PAUL'S shoulder). You have no ghosts to fear; they have all been laid by your atoning kindness. Whatever wrongs you did, they have been paid for thousand times and more. How few others in this world can say the same! If every one took a narcotic to escape from an accusing spirit, the greater part of the world would be sleeping all the time. You served your prison term for the crime for which you were convicted—a little defalcation, I believe; you paid your debt, and no man has a right to look askance at you. The convict who has carried out his sentence is worthier far of one's respect and honor than are

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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the many criminals we meet each day in business whose misdeeds go unpunished.

PAUL. That is the least, old man, that troubles me. I served my sentence to the minute of the day, and every dollar lost by my transaction I repaid with more than double interest.

JACK. And most of those who howled the loudest about their lost dollar were those you had befriended before your fall.

PAUL. I can forget all that. It was worth all the horrors of disgrace, the golden chance to know who were my friends. I found but one true heart—you—you—Jack—you—who did not fear the shadow of my shame, but stood by me as when my sunshine reigned. No ghosts torment me there. But 'tis the fact that I killed my dear mother by the shock of my disgrace that broke her heart—that ghost can never die.

JACK. Fear the dead least of all. The dead are wise, and therefore generous; they understand life's errors now, and pity us, but not condemn. But that ghost, too, is laid. Self-sacrifice atones for every wrong and error. Your sacrifice is one which staunchest hearts would shrink from—you give your life to kneeling in devotion before the shrine of memories that

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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wound. This house that you live in because it was loved by your mother, turn it, for her sake, into a sacred temple, when the sight of its every feature arouses torments that invoke you to flee. To keep and manage the house just as she kept it—her bed-room like an altar preserved—old faithful Tom, the butler, her little pet dog, the cat and bird to be undisturbed in the comfortable daily routine; using the rich estate for charity only, and spending not a cent of it on yourself—you live here, defying the burns and stings of memory, and ostracism of the townspeople who rail at you as being shameless for having come back.

PAUL. I could not touch a dollar of it. I hold it as a holy trust estate, and when I die (*placing his arm on JACK'S shoulder*), I leave it to my one faithful friend, who'll use it reverently as I, and whose hands, unlike mine, are unstained.

JACK (*clasping PAUL'S hand*). No one can foretell the whims of death. I may be the first to be gone. But if I survive you, of this fact rest assured—the estate will be carried on exactly in the same way as by you. The daily life in this house will run on unchanged; the peace of old Tom, the dog, and the cat will never be disturbed. The robins, when they come, will receive their

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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daily morning bread, and the potted plants will not miss your attention. Old Black Jasper will never be refused his bundle of old clothes, nor Bridget Gorman her "bit of tobacco to warm her nose," and as for your mother's precious clothing and trinkets, which you keep locked up in her bureau drawer as sacred relics, I am resolved, if I have not one worthy to leave them to, to reverently burn them before I die.

PAUL. That is just what I want you to do. Never permit them to fall into profane hands. But I am haunted by a sweet dream that will never die—that lost love will return and live in this house with you, when I am away, and repay your unselfish friendship for me and warm and cheer you as I could never do. But that is the doorbell. Old boy, you'll have to go. I made poor Tom go to bed—his lumbago tormented him so. If any one wants to see me, tell him that I have retired; but let any one who cares to do so stay for the night. I'll look after poor Tom. I do not think that a little toddy would do the old fellow any harm.

*(PAUL goes out.)*

*(JACK brightens the lamp, and goes out. A few moments afterwards, the door re-opens, and JACK re-enters the room in great agitation, fol-*

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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lowed by JENNIE MCKEE and LITTLE PAUL. PAUL springs at once toward the lounge on which the little dog had taken possession, clasps it in his arms and fondles it affectionately. Then, suddenly noticing the book-case, filled with books, he seats himself on the floor before it, the dog cuddling itself between his legs, and ravenously pulls out book after book from the case. JENNIE attempts to kneel down before JACK, but he quickly lifts her to her feet, and leads her to an arm-chair in the center of the room, with looks of anguish, dread, and pity.)

JENNIE (*in excited whisper*). I did not come to make any trouble—I did not come for a cent of money—I have no such feelings in my heart toward you—I came just for the boy's sake—before God I swear it! I have lived a pure life for the last eight years; I was guilty with that one man alone—and lived only for the child—earning a hard, but honest living—I have no feelings toward you but remorse for the way I treated you and am willing to suffer forever for my wrong. He'll be ten years old tomorrow. He was one year old when I ran away with him from you. I have tried to raise him well. He is wonderfully bright and loves to read. See how he goes after those books! I am not able to look

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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after him and work, too, and my health is beginning to fail—and he needs a guiding father's care. I cannot trust any one to look after him at all, and he has a strong will of his own. I cannot expect you to have anything to do with me, but he needs you now more than he does me, and I will keep out of your sight and his forever—only that I know he is safe with you. I did not want to embarrass you at the bank where you are employed, so waited until night and brought him here. I heard that you made your home with your friend after whom the boy is named. Only tell me that you'll keep him, and I'll quietly slip away.

JACK. No, Jennie, you will not slip away. When you go from this house, we go together. It was I, and not you, that was guilty, Jennie. I gave my time and affection to my business instead of to you. How could your misfortune been other than it was! You craved love, which it was the duty of your husband to bestow. He failed to give it—although he felt it, but you could not know. A designing stranger quickly noticed my dangerous fault and took advantage of it—that is the plain, sad truth. Believe me, Jennie, since the day you went away, my heart has been haunted by the ghost of remorse.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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I searched in vain for you everywhere ; you seem to have disappeared from the sight of the earth.

*(Unperceived by any one of the three in the room the door partly opens and PAUL'S face appears, gazing in rapture at the boy.)*

JACK. But we'll not go out to-night, the storm is too wild—and I must first speak to my friend Paul, though I break his noble heart. I promised to live with him in this house until his death, and after his death to still live here and carry on his duty to the dead. But he's of a lofty soul—he'll understand that duty to the living comes before duty to the dead.

*(PAUL approaches LITTLE PAUL, lifts him up into his arms and kissing him, stands in front of JACK and JENNIE, and speaks to them with looks of supreme happiness.)*

PAUL. There will be no need of any conflict between duty to the dead and duty to the living ! They will run together harmoniously. Is not this your home, Jack ? And is not your home the home of your wife and child ? And here is the heir to the house after we are gone, that I have prayed for, and all of our worries have now disappeared. See how he takes to mother's books and little dog ! God has surely sent him here to show that dark

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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pasts are forgiven, and remorse has had its day. You say that to-morrow is his birthday? We'll have a jolly little party, won't we, Paul? And Jack (*walking to the book-case and picking up the box of bromides on the top*), you may throw away the box of bromides—they will not be needed any more. Ghosts have gone away from this house forever, and in their place, angels are here.

# Adversity



## PERSONS

ROBERT IRVIN, A lawyer  
MRS. APPEL, A boarding-house keeper  
IRMA BRONNER, Her assistant  
HARRY BROOKS, A bank clerk

SCENE: *Room of Robert Irvin in the boarding-house of Mrs. Appel, in Louisville, Kentucky.*

TIME: 1909.

*(Robert is sitting alone in the room, on the edge of his bed, in torn and shabby dressing gown, in deep and gloomy reverie.)*

ROBERT. Deeper and deeper dark shadows surround me—shades of adversity, shadows of woe. Hopes and dreams of my childhood fade far away from me, and spectres alone are my company. The spring of my youth has long frolicked away, and summer has followed its way of the past, and my autumnal leaves lie under the ice of my life's bleak and pitiless winter.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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(*A knock is heard at the door. ROBERT not answering it, the door slowly opens, and IRMA BRONNER enters the room, bearing a package of mail.*)

IRMA. There were two cents due on the package, but I paid the postman for you. Oh, never mind about that! Don't you remember the stamp you gave me for my letter to Freddie about a week ago?

ROBERT (*receiving the package from IRMA*). The same old sickening story—the manuscript returned again. (*Abstractedly.*) Oh, yes. By the way, what's the latest news of Freddie?

IRMA (*aggrieved*). Have you forgotten already what I told you about him last night? of his fine report that I showed to you?

ROBERT. Forgive me, Irma; I remember now the pleasure your news gave to me; but the heavy night clouds that envelope my thoughts absorb all the bright rays that flash amidst their gloom, and make me unmindful of all but my darkness. I cannot remain here any longer, Irma; I have no heart to make another promise. Mrs. Appel has been indulgent enough; I have no dream even of a prospect to pay her, or any one else, a cent of board. I must go, and at once; but God alone knows where or how; I must

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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find some kind of work to do, if it be but in the streets.

IRMA (*impulsively*). Mr. Irvin, do not be foolish—do not be angry with me! But if you would look at things in a practical way, and accept a few dollars that are of no use to me! You will soon be on your feet again; fortune will change its mood; and the only pleasure that we can have in this world is to help one another; you know that is true. You have helped so many others; let others now help **you**.

ROBERT. Foolish I may be, but angry with you, Irma, never. It is because I am looking at things in a practical way that I must refuse your proffered assistance. Had I one dream-fire emblem in which I could form a picture of the slightest change of fortune, I would accept your generous offer; but cold practicability has frozen all my dream light away, and left me nothing to stare at but ashes. The most ungrateful people in the world are clients; no matter how faithfully their lawyer may have served them they quickly forget his services, and they are the first to flee from him and to assail him when he falls into trouble. A lawyer with his office furniture attached and without means to rent a desk or office is regarded by them almost as a criminal,

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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although he may have saved them from the penitentiary. Who would bring any business to me in my miserable state of fortune, excepting they who would tempt me in my desperation? There's no more despised object in this world than an unsuccessful lawyer. To win success, we must act the part of success; but to do so, we must have at least some paraphernalia; I have not even a fragment of a costume to wear; we cannot play the part in the nakedness of truth. But there is Harry Brooks. I can hear his step a half a square away—the best of fellows in the world, when there's nothing of him wanted, and when things go his way.

IRMA. He's at the door. I'll go and let him in; perhaps he may be of help to you.

ROBERT. Never think of that! He's one of those who from an outstretched hand flee as if from contagion.

(IRMA goes.)

ROBERT. What can he want? Some free advice, no doubt, or legal work he does not wish to pay for. How there can be such contrasts between souls! she, towering nobility, he creeping meanness—and breathing the same air! But I'll not be troubled with his company long; I'll ask him to lend me some money.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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(Enter HARRY BROOKS, *gayly*.)

HARRY. That's a peach of a girl who opened the door for me. I'll get you to make a date for me with her. You don't mind sharing her with a friend? But what have I said? what have I done?

ROBERT (*indignantly*). You have said enough, Harry Brooks, to insult by word and thought one of the purest creatures on this earth. If this world were filled with women only half as good as she, it would be brilliant with the halo light of saints and angels.

HARRY. Well, there's no need of getting so up in the air about it; she's only a Jewess, after all; and if she does walk a little straighter than Christian girls, it is because she expects to be the gainer by it; she'll make some fellow in the end pay for what she is missing.

ROBERT. I hate to hear any one talk like that, especially one like you who should know so much better. I tell you, Harry, she's a noble girl, making a slave of herself to support her little brother.

HARRY (*laughing cynically*). Working to support her little brother! I have heard that before, and from public women. That is what they all call them—their little brothers. Are

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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you that soft? Sisters do not make slaves of themselves for little brothers. Well, I'll not say another word about your pretty Jewess. By the way, it occurs to me that you always did have a liking for the Hebrews; I never could understand you.

ROBERT. I remember that the Saviour of the world chose to be born of a Jewish maiden, and I bow my head in reverence to the Jews.

HARRY (*quickly*). Enough about that. I dropped into your office for a little advice, but the janitor met me in the hall and told me that you had removed from the building; but he did not know where you had gone, and said that I might find you at your room.

ROBERT. That was certainly an act of charity on the part of the janitor. By the way, he is a Jew.

HARRY. I fail to understand what you mean by that remark. Where's the charity in telling me that you had moved?

ROBERT. His charity lay in this, that he withheld the ugly truth, unlike so many of my so-called friends in higher circles, who delight in parading it. He might have informed you of the humiliating fact that my office door was closed upon me and my office furniture attached

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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for debt, and that I am now without office or desk because I have not the money with which to pay rent. I am glad that you came to see me; I was going to look you up; I want you to help me out of my trouble a little. I will have to give up my room to-night.

HARRY (*petulantly*). This is my usual rotten luck! I have a little claim against a fellow that I wanted you to bluff out. I don't want to spend any money, and I don't want to go to law about it. You're the only lawyer that I know who would not charge me anything; every other lawyer wants a fee. But, of course, if you have no office or phone, you can do no bluffing. My usual luck! I'll have to see what I can do about it. (*Starting to leave the room.*)

ROBERT. I'm sorry that I can do nothing for you now; but if you'll help me to get on my feet again, I'll be able to do something for you later. How much do you think you can conveniently lend me? I'd like to settle with my landlady, first of all.

HARRY. If you want anything like that, you'll have to talk to some one else, Robert. It is against my principles to borrow or lend. I think it is a very unbusiness-like proceeding, and do not believe in encouraging it at all; especially

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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with my fine position at bank, and prospects of a much better one very soon, it would never do for me to indulge in such unbusiness-like methods. Remember what Shakespeare warns us about: "Neither a borrower or a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend." A good business-like motto, that; I am not at all anxious to lose your friendship or my money.

ROBERT. But you must remember in whose mouth Shakespeare put that motto; in the mouth of one of the most despicable creatures in fiction; old Polonius was incapable of understanding true friendship, which delights more in giving than in receiving. Besides, remember that One greater than Shakespeare has said, "And from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away."

HARRY. Well, I don't know who it was who said that; it's an unbusiness-like saying, I'm sure. But here's the thing; we all have our principles and ideas, and it is best for each of us to stick to them. You, for instance, have a fancy for the Jews; for my part, I despise them.

ROBERT. Despise the Jew or not, this you may take as an axiom; a Jew never cries for help to another Jew in vain, while Christians shut their ears on the moans of Christians; and the most

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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prejudiced enemies of the Jews would not dare to call them unbusiness-like people.

HARRY (*looking at his watch uneasily*). A quarter to eight! I must hurry off! I've an engagement at the Seelbach at eight. A jolly little dinner party—wish you could be there—five dollars a plate, you know. Well, as soon as you have an office again, let me know, and if I've done nothing with it yet, I'll get you to help me out with this claim. Have a smoke? (*Offering ROBERT a cigar.*) No? stopped smoking, have you? Better try this; I paid ten dollars for the box of these cigars. I tell you, it takes money to live.

(HARRY *hurriedly goes out.*)

ROBERT. Goodbye—goodbye—to such as you forever! What a hideous caricature is selfishness when unclothed! In the sunlight of my fortune, you kept your nature partly hidden, but in my darkness, you stripped it, and exposed its deformity! And this was the comrade of my earliest childhood! for whose sake I often was punished at school! with whom I shared the contents of my daily lunch basket, selecting for him always the better share. This is he on whose account I made quarrels and enemies, and spent the pennies in my pocket for his share, not for

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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mine; about whom I wove fancies of sweet life-long friendship, and of deeds of heroic loyalty! Well, let it be buried with my other dead dreams—this boyish dream of friendship lasting forever! without a flower to lie on its bier; let it rest undisturbed forever! And now for another bitter morsel to swallow; I hear the footsteps of Mrs. Appel. (*Taking off his dressing gown, and laying it on the bed, and donning his coat hanging on a chair.*)

(*Enter MRS. APPEL, holding a handkerchief to her eyes.*)

MRS. APPEL. Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! Mr. Irvin, you've not treated me right! and it's all because I'm a poor widow, and too soft, as my husband said! Yes, that is what my poor husband said, surely as I'm standing here on my tired, blistered feet. He died twenty years ago, but his words I can never forget. "Matilda, you're too soft," he said. I wish he were here to-night; but I would not want him to know how I've been treated, all because I did not mind his warning words. He'd turn in his grave, Mr. Irvin, if he knew what you did to me! (*Again holding her handkerchief to her eyes.*) Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! nearly two months board you owe me to-night! and there's the college opening up

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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on the square above; and students clamoring for neighborhood board! I could easily have three in this room to-night, if I were not too soft to turn you out. And, oh my! Oh my! Oh my! I could put the law, Mr. Irvin, on you and attach all the things you have got, if I were not too soft, as my husband said. Mr. Irvin, if you've half a heart, you'd vacate to-morrow and give me your things of your own accord!

ROBERT. Mrs. Appel, it was my intention to give up this room to-night and as for my poor belongings, you can have everything that is mine in the room, excepting the clothes I have on, and my hat. (*Picking up his hat lying on the bed.*)

MRS. APPEL. Oh my! Oh my! And that is no more than right! But mind you! I did not tell you to get out of the house to-night! It will be just like people giving me a bad name, and saying I turned boarders out in the night! But that is the thanks I get for being too soft, and not minding what my poor husband said. (*Holding the handkerchief again to her eyes.*) Well, a poor widow must do the best she can do. I can get three dollars for that trunk—and it's open—yes, I can sell that white shirt, vest, and pair of white trousers; they won't bring much—and that night shirt, too—to the old Polish Jew—and these

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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collars, and cuffs, and neckties, too—and that umbrella there in the corner—and that bottle of ink I can use. That dressing gown—it will help fill up my bag of rags—rags are selling at better prices, now. I believe that's all. (*Looking searchingly around the room.*) Those old papers—you don't want them? Old paper is selling rather high, just now. I'll send Irma to gather the things together, and clean up the room for my new boarders—and Mr. Irvin—I don't bear you any malice—I'm too soft for that—as my poor husband said—but I don't see how you can sleep a bit until you have paid me every penny you owe!

(*Leaving the room, with handkerchief to her eyes.*)

ROBERT. Now, that ordeal is over. The next thing's to go where? (*Donning his hat, and looking toward the door as in a stupor.*)

(*Re-enter IRMA, hurriedly.*)

IRMA. You have given up your room, and all that you own, and without a penny in your pocket you are going out homeless into the night! You would not refuse a gift, I know—a handkerchief, necktie, or pair of gloves; what is the difference between them and a few coins? Mr.

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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Irvin, do not refuse my little gift. (*Pressing a small purse into ROBERT'S hand.*)

ROBERT. Since you picture it in that light, Irma, I cannot refuse your gift, and I will carry it as many do who wear holy medals. Yes, I have given Mrs. Appel all that I own, excepting the clothes that I wear and this dead dream (*picking up the package of mail which IRMA had previously brought to him*), this faded leaf of a hope once green that with my pen I could do a little good. This is a story I wrote that is old and true—that occurs every day as the world rolls on—of a pure girl who sacrificed all that she held dear for the sake of her loved ones—selling her virtue to be true—a victim of cruel business and custom. But editors dread to publish true stories as these, from fear that they may jar some of the guilty patrons' nerves; so like many other truths, it must perish on the way, crushed beneath the rolling wheels of policy.

IRMA (*eagerly*). You would not turn aside then, from an erring woman, Mr. Irvin?

ROBERT. I shake hands with erring men every hour of the day; why should I turn aside from erring women?

IRMA. Let me read your story; let me take care of it for you; I cannot believe that a good

## *Shadows on the Wall*

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thought is ever wasted; the purpose of its creation will some time surely triumph; one day, it must meet with opportunity to shine.

ROBERT (*handing the package to IRMA*). You may do with it what you will; I feel that I can never write again; I cannot write and at the same time live stories; I am living a story, and a tragic one, at that.

IRMA. I cannot agree with you; art is the daughter of soul and sorrow; I believe that none except they who have suffered can picture or sing the songs of the human heart.

ROBERT. Well, goodbye, now, Irma; you have been very kind to me; and you are the only person in the world whom I would regret to leave, if I should die to-night.

(ROBERT *goes out.*)

IRMA (*throwing herself upon her knees beside ROBERT'S bed*). O God, protect him! O God, protect me! O God, protect us both! For I love him. God! I love him!















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